

827
C U R S O R Y
R E M A R K S

ON THE
REVEREND DR. PRIESTLEY'S
L E T T E R

TO THE
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER:

CONTAINING

HINTS, humbly offered in Favour of the Establishment, and opposed to the Principles contained in that Publication;

In a LETTER addressed to the DOCTOR,
BY A L A Y M A N.

Let their pretences be what they will, this is what our Chief LAY REFORMERS did aim at; people have seen it already, and posterity hereafter will more experience it; that it is not that God's Clergy may be made better, that they are thus lifted at, but because they that pretend to reform them, might enjoy their possessions.

GROOME's Historical Collections.

PRINTED FOR JOHN DENIS, No. 2, NEW BRIDGE-STREET,
FLEET-STREET.

MDCC LXXXVII.



CURSORY REMARKS.

REVEREND SIR,

IT is perhaps an attempt, that at first sight may appear very presumptuous, for an unknown and insignificant individual (as the author of this small pamphlet confessedly avows himself to be) to dare a few observations on the pen of a writer so distinguished as yours is in the wide extended walks of literature.—But that consideration, though it may at first startle, will not leave any lasting alarm, on one who, from the humility of his situation, and ideas, need not fear falling; and who, by the same reasons, is totally precluded from all the ambitious views of controversy. Conceiving you therefore

B

as

as I do, Reverend Sir, to be as sincere a lover of truth and free enquiry as I am, and as you profess yourself to be, I shall make no farther apology for offering in this public manner the following remarks to your notice;—I hope they arise only from the principles of true Christian charity, a love to the constitution of that country I have the happiness to be born under; and an individual respect to yourself, whom I have ever considered as a hearty labourer in the vineyard of the gospel.

But as mere difference of opinion ought to make no breach in Christian charity, I shall freely confess, that on some heads mentioned in your letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I think you appear, with an ingenuity which you are accustomed to use, to confound so many things together, that, on a slight survey, you have varnished over the application of the Dissenters for the repeal of the test-act, in such pleasing colours; giving it such an air of virtuous simplicity, and yet

yet at the same time laudable exertion, that the measure seems, as I before observed, at a first view, such as every friend to toleration should devoutly wish to be granted to the petitioners.

As to your address to the Minister, or your own or your party's, or any other party's expectations from him, as to his conduct about the once proposed reform, his education, or his principles, they are subjects I shall not meddle with. I am not going to panegyryze Mr. Pitt, or to condemn Dr. Priestley. They, as well as humble me, are amenable to a tribunal, where every controversy is unnecessary for the discovery of those truths, which surround it in one eternal blaze of refulgency.

But to the subject. I must first remark one passage in the fifth page of your letter, which runs as follows :

“ As an individual, give as much attention to religion, and a future life, as

“ you please ; but as the oftensible Prime
 “ Minister of *this country*, you have no-
 “ thing to do with any life besides the
 “ present, and the happiness of the inha-
 “ bitants of this island in it.”——What
 a position, Reverend Sir, have you laid
 down here ! Is this a compliment to the
 Minister or *this country*, or to the eternal
 and ever watchful providence of the
 Father of all countries ? Let it be de-
 signed for whom it may, they will be
 little obliged to you for the observation.
 —If it is to apply to the Minister, it must
 insinuate, that to make a Minister, there
 requires only a versatility of manners, know-
 ledge, and general dissimulation ; which
 are dispositions always best exerted by
 those who answer this description ; and
 who have not, nor have the presumption
 even to think they have, any thing to do
 with any life besides the present ; but,
 unchecked by any principles of consci-
 ence, which must be founded on the
 ideas of futurity, and superior by their si-
 tuation to human appeals, may thus take,
 unrestrained by any ties, divine or human,
 what-

whatever steps interest or ambition may point out, either for their own aggrandizement, or that of their country.—Such was not the statesman of old, who, when a project was delivered to him, that bid fair to have ruined the enemy, replied, “It will be advantageous, but it is not just.”——But if this observation is to apply to *this country*, as one of a peculiar description, gracious God! what is the spirit of the remark, but that the Minister of this country, (called and believed to be a nation which has received the first lights of revelation) will be the best governor of it, if he neither knows, and *according to your instructions*, acts as if he neither knew nor thought any thing about it?——But, Reverend Sir, if this extraordinary passage applies to the third part of my remark on your observation—I must answer you in words more forcible on so solemn an occasion, and let the Almighty speak for himself, and answer in his own words; let him shew you that he requires something more from the rulers of the people, than you require them to
pos-

possess ; for upon the appointment of Joshua, he says, ‘ The book of the law
 ‘ shall never depart out of thy mouth,
 ‘ but thou shalt meditate therein day and
 ‘ night, that thou mayest observe to do
 ‘ according to all that is written therein.’

This, let the Minister remember, the King of kings requires at his hands ; and let him not be led away with a vain idea that he has nothing to do with any concerns but mere state artifice, lest, as the apostle observes on another occasion, ‘ he having hope only in this life, should
 ‘ be of all men most miserable.’——Let me conjure you, Reverend Sir, to reflect, with your accustomed temper and coolness, upon the danger that may be done to religion, in thus separating it from the lawful government of the state, and indeed throwing it by as useless lumber, having neither weight nor value, in that just distribution of rewards or punishments, which upright legislation is always bound religiously to preserve, and not to preserve merely from temporal views alone, but from views of the highest
 con-

consequence, the union of order as a state, and the improvement of morals, virtue and religion.

I come now, Sir, to the following observation, page 11. “Why, then, should
 “not the proposed trial be made? for
 “every regulation of this kind can be
 “nothing more than a trial, or experi-
 “ment. If any danger should arise from
 “it, it could not be so sudden, but that
 “there might be time enough to prevent
 “the mischief from being fatal to us.”—

When reasons of great consequence, amounting to almost absolute necessities, can be given for any change, they, like surgical operations, must and ought to be submitted to; and it is weakness to refuse to undergo such trial.—If, Sir, the Dissenters were really aggrieved or oppressed, if either their religious rites or opinions were interrupted or refused them, I should with heart and hand have joined their application; I should say with you, Reverend Sir, that the trial should be
 made;

made ;—but when we recollect what have been the consequences of revolutions, in politics, or general opinions in religion, we must confess, that these are not experiments hastily to be made ; or trials rashly to be ventured upon. For I am convinced, however it might serve the argument, Dr. Priestley is too well grounded in the records of time, and circumstances, to believe, that the *experiment* once made, and proving noxious, there would be time enough to prevent the mischief becoming fatal. Rights, whether just or unjust, once given up by the governors, can seldom be resumed from the governed, without the exertion of force ; and force, when once exerted upon religious occasions, is a wide wasting mischief, too fatal for a moderate man even to think on without horror.—You have justly observed that every reformation has been the effect of change—that change therefore, in itself, is no evil, we readily allow ; nor do we wish to consider it as such.—But let us beware of that internal restlessness of the human heart, which is too often discontented

contented with the most perfect situation of things, that the fallibility of all human institutions will allow; and which sees an ideal perfection that exists only in the heated imagination of those, who fancy a world as it ought to be, forgetting the state of the world as it really is. Thus under an idea of supporting, what would really be the natural rights of mankind, were they all as they ought to be, virtuous, undefining and unambitious; they are ready to take away the necessary curbs which restrain those, who too frequently make a veil of patriotism, or religion, to disturb the public peace, or embroil the establish'd worship of the kingdom. I do not wish to be understood as trying to fix so odious a charge on the present petitioners; on the contrary, I most sincerely love and value those who are impelled only by a regard to real, unprejudiced religion; but they will not, I hope, be angry with me, for saying that the body of the Dissenters, who have supported the petitioners, appear to me to be forging chains for themselves and us; and I fear that like the frogs in the fable,

C

they,

made ;—but when we recollect what have been the consequences of revolutions, in politics, or general opinions in religion, we must confess, that these are not experiments hastily to be made ; or trials rashly to be ventured upon. For I am convinced, however it might serve the argument, Dr. Priestley is too well grounded in the records of time, and circumstances, to believe, that the *experiment* once made, and proving noxious, there would be time enough to prevent the mischief becoming fatal. Rights, whether just or unjust, once given up by the governors, can seldom be resumed from the governed, without the exertion of force ; and force, when once exerted upon religious occasions, is a wide wasting mischief, too fatal for a moderate man even to think on without horror.—You have justly observed that every reformation has been the effect of change—that change therefore, in itself, is no evil, we readily allow ; nor do we wish to consider it as such.—But let us beware of that internal restlessness of the human heart, which is too often discontented

contented with the most perfect situation of things, that the fallibility of all human institutions will allow ; and which sees an ideal perfection that exists only in the heated imagination of those, who fancy a world as it ought to be, forgetting the state of the world as it really is. Thus under an idea of supporting, what would really be the natural rights of mankind, were they all as they ought to be, virtuous, undesigning and unambitious ; they are ready to take away the necessary curbs which restrain those, who too frequently make a veil of patriotism, or religion, to disturb the public peace, or embroil the establish'd worship of the kingdom. I do not wish to be understood as trying to fix so odious a charge on the present petitioners ; on the contrary, I most sincerely love and value those who are impelled only by a regard to real, unprejudiced religion ; but they will not, I hope, be angry with me, for saying that the body of the Dissenters, who have supported the petitioners, appear to me to be forging chains for themselves and us ; and I fear that like the frogs in the fable,

C

they,

they, not contented with their present political governors, the establishment ; which I will liken to the log that Jupiter first threw down among them, but whose indolence did not suit the activity of their dispositions, will not cease to weary heaven, till they get a king that will fall upon his own subjects as the crane did ; who the thunderer in his wrath sent at last among the discontented animals. By an exchange, which I fear will be made to a Presbytery, which always carries religious interference farther, and as violently, as Episcopacy has ever done, and being in religion, what a republic is in government, is always a heavier tyranny over individuals than monarchy, as it is composed of a greater number of rulers, whose oppositions divide the people into their own trifling yet eager contentions. But lest I should be told, that by proving too much I have proved nothing, and that when alluding to the fable, I called the establishment a log, and by so doing, either meant to expose it to ridicule, or must be obliged to confess it useless, if not injurious ; lest I say, this
should

should be charged upon me, I must trespass, Rev. Sir, a little on your time, to explain my opinion on establishments ; for it is now time for me to say, that whatever use I think them of, to keep by their authority, the various religious defenders of particular creeds, from attacking each other with any other weapon than the pen ; yet I conceive the highest praise that can be bestowed upon them, farther than this, is to say that they are quiet, I will not say supine ; that they interfere not with the religious opinions of any of the peaceable subjects of the kingdom, nor restrain in any case, their particular rites, religious ceremonies, or worship, so long as such rites and worship, militate not against the public morals and general administration of the government. This, sir, alone is in my humble opinion, toleration ; a system that can exist only, where the establishment is so cautious of embroiling the state, that by honest and well meaning minds, who have too great a share of that internal restlessness I before hinted at, may be mistaken for indolence and supineness ; or at least, I fear often

serves for founding such a charge, for the purpose of levelling, if possible, so excellent, temperate and well ordered a constitution, which has not for the last century known or produced one single instance of individual persecution. Every thing beyond this cannot be called toleration, and therefore overthrows the very prayer of the petitioners themselves, as all that exceeds this must be called *establishment*, and in every view that it can possibly be placed in, tends with the most unjustifiable rashness, to take away the only authority that can interfere, with proper weight, amongst the jarring passions of men, whose heated imaginations will all see a divine right in their own peculiar opinions or prejudices; the consequence of which must inevitably be, what has been before, the endeavours of every party to procure an establishment of their own theological tenets.

In your twelfth page I find the following words, " Bishops are recorded in all
 " histories, as the most jealous, the most
 " timorous, and of course the most vindictive of all men."

Had

Had I not the authority of your name, Rev. Sir, to convince me that the letter to Mr. Pitt, was your production ; all your enemies, could not have persuaded me to believe, that the author of the Corruptions of Christianity, was the same man who penned the letter in question. Nor do I indeed admit that they are the production of the same person, but must suppose your situation of mind, heated in the present contest, to be that of Brutus's ; so shortly yet so beautifully described by Shakespear,

“ That poor Brutus, with himself at war,

“ Forgets the shew of love to other men.”

For surely such an indiscriminate and general censure of any set of men whatever, would be highly blameable, in an indifferent writer on politics ; but in a follower of him who when he was reviled, reviled not again, it must be considered as a compleat desertion of those christian principles that the gospel lays down ; this is not the frame of mind there described, which *speakes no evil*. And to this I may add, that the many illustrious names that might
be

be mentioned, formerly existing among that body of men, would shew your assertion not well founded. Can I, as an impartial Protestant, refuse my tribute of gratitude to such a Bishop as the famous Grossete, Bishop of Durham, who though a Catholic, and in the darkest times of Papal ignorance, exerted his utmost endeavours to prevent persecution, and to enlighten mankind. Is the virtuous Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and one of the same persuasion, a character that answers your description? and to come nigher our own time and our own profession, shall Tillotson, Secker,* Newton, Wilson, and many more, that might be mentioned, if I had

* As a proof of Secker's vindictive disposition, if I am not mistaken, take the following anecdote.----- When the most senseless, and yet malevolent free-thinker that ever vilified Christianity, was by his imprudence reduced to the extreme of poverty, this true disciple of his great Master, forgot all the trifling abuse that his pen had lavished on him and his profession, and allowed him out of his privy purse, a decent maintenance till he died; those who know most of the history of those times, will know I mean Peter Annet.

an

an inclination to make this a book, instead of a pamphlet. Shall they, my dear sir, be recorded “as the most jealous, the most timorous, and of course the most vindictive of men;” Forbid it charity, forbid it truth. In short I must beg your pardon when I do it, but the lines force themselves from my pen. This character of the Bishops of the Church of England, could only suit those times described by Butler,

“ When oyster women lock’d their fish up,
 “ And trudg’d away to cry, no Bishop.”

I might as justly say, that Presbyterianism could by the records of history, be clearly proved to be composed of nothing more than a system of violence and persecution, to all those of opposite opinions.— If I chose to ransack publications, that in your extensive reading, I dare say you are no stranger to ; I mean Geo. Bishop’s New England Judged by the Spirit of the Lord, Mather’s History of New England, &c. where the reader may find the Dissenters who left England themselves on the account of persecution, imprisoning, cutting
 off

off the ears, and hanging up the Quakers, men, women and children, because they differed from them in religious worship.— John O’Leyden, and the Anabaptists of Munster, or the Pre-Adamites of our own country, might as well be brought forwards to disgrace the Dissenters, with as much shew of argument, and as much fairness of reasoning.

I come now to the following remark in the eighteenth page :

“ What we are aiming at is to enlighten
 “ the minds of the people, and to shew
 “ them that in the church establishment,
 “ there is much of error and superstition ;
 “ and if we can convince them that it is
 “ so, (and of this I have no doubt) in
 “ proper time, they will take it down of
 “ themselves.”

This, Reverend Sir, is not a fair representation of the conduct of the Dissenters ; and from the same reason I infer, that it is not a fair representation of their design. I
 shall

shall not now enter into the dispute whether there is or is not error and superstition in the church ; I can easily pass that by, though I do not admit the assertion, and, on the contrary, think it rather uncivil : (but I thank my God I have learnt some degree of temper in all the religious controversies I have ever been engaged in) and shall on this passage only observe, that the Dissenters do not rest with only convincing the people that the establishment is wrong, and so leaving them till that conviction takes place, to take it down of themselves ; on the contrary, they insist by the present application to have the honour of taking it down for them.—Knowing, I suppose, by the spirit of prophecy that the proper time is now at hand.——

A few lines farther, you say,

“ After this there may be *no Bishops*, as
 “ the term is now understood ; but there
 “ may be Christian ministers, the people
 “ may be as well instructed in their duty,
 “ they may live as happily, and make as
 “ good

“good provision for their happiness here-
“after.”

The very name Bishop, seems to be the great stumbling block, and rock of offence; it is the only unrighteous thing that is to be put out of the camp of the Israelites, and when that is done, however dangerous the attempt, or fatal the consequences we are only to be where we were before, to live *as happily* here, and provide as well for hereafter. On this head I shall say no more, it is a mode of political arithmetic that seems to throw so small a balance in our favour.

A much more serious argument now offers itself to my view; an argument, I am just as much interested in, Reverend Sir, as you and your friends—you say.

“If you would make the toleration
“*complete*, you must give us a power of
“doing that by law, which we now do
“by *connivance*; the power of declaring
“and defending our religious principles.”

How

How you could *ever* find yourself justified in making this assertion I know not; but for you to make it, at the very instant you are doing the very thing you require leave to perform, is such a mode of trifling with the argument as is not suitable to the rank you hold, as a minister, tolerated by the establishment, and, at the instant, employed in combating its principles; and that not by *connivance*, not by any secret clandestine methods of conveying your opinions to the public, by such methods as might elude both search and discovery; but openly publishing that very letter of complaint, signed with your name, and avowed as your act and deed. And surely no man would wish, in the most distant manner, that you or the champion of any religious sect or party, should be molested for such a proceeding, or in the least impeded in the execution of it. God forbid! Let us hear if fairly and quietly urged; all the complaints that you have to set forth; and let us answer them with as much temper and moderation.—When I said in the first entering on this part of

D 2 your

your letter, that it was a serious argument, and that I was as much interested in it as yourself, I said so from a conviction that I had no little ground for the assertion. It is not serious as founded on truth, but serious as it applies to the fears and the prejudices of the multitude, for it seems as aptly fitted to raise a religious tumult as if it had been wrote with such a design. Every one who does not think or practice as the establishment sets forth, is hereby, if he has not too much good sense, led into an alarm for his individual safety, and is ready to join any party against this horrid establishment, till it is by some means levelled; which if once brought about by such a conspiracy, the authors of its destruction would then find time to turn the points of their own swords against each others breasts; and civil dissentions must unavoidably prevail till one party, by numbers or address, gaining the ascendant; common sense (without much labour to prove so self evident a matter) would as certainly lead them to *found an establishment*, in which
they

they are agreed themselves, and which, if they are as moderate as the establishment of the present day, they will join with the civil or secular authority; not only for their own security, but to enable it to interfere with due weight, to prevent the mischiefs that would infallibly arise, from the inferior sects attacking each other, without such interference so supported. In short, as I before observed, I am as nearly and as deeply interested in this part of your remarks, as yourself and your party. I enjoy the benefits of this *connivance*, as you term it, with a grateful heart, and chearful spirits. I am a Protestant of the Church of England, in the common acceptance of the word; but I frequent not her ceremonies, nor those of any other place of religious worship, and yet I live unmolested and unabused, in the quiet enjoyment of my opinions, prejudices, or mistakes, which ever they may be; and at the same time, when I turn over the historic page, I am enraptured to see the change that science, and the better knowledge of the true principles of religion, has introduced among
our

our governors in theological matters ; who confess by their moderation in practice, that although a law, and a testimony, are necessary, for to bear a general and public witness, that God is ; and that he is to be worshipped, adored, and (so far as human frailty may be allowed the expression, when speaking of a Being so infinitely above our idea, beloved) yet, that even that establishment itself, obliges no man to worship, or adore, in that way which they think best ; when such manner does not suit his conceptions or inclination, they therefore wisely let him alone, so long as his public conduct militates not against public morals, or the established law ;—and he keeps from interfering with, or desiring to enjoy those honours or emoluments, which the state has assigned to those, whose communion with it, religious and civil, it has no doubt about.

You say, Reverend Sir, “ Repeal the
 “ Act of King William, which makes it
 “ blasphemy to impugn the doctrine of
 “ the Trinity, I think it my duty to
 “ attempt

“ attempt the utter overthrow of this
 “ doctrine ; which I conceive to be a fun-
 “ damental corruption of the religion
 “ which I profess.”

For the sake of that religion which you profess, as well as the rank and deserved esteem that you hold in the world, preserve consistency, in a matter of such moment ; do not give those who are perfectly careless in religious concerns, such an opportunity of wounding theology, through your sides.—You say you think it your duty to oppose this doctrine. Who has ever hindered Dr. Priestly from performing this duty ? many years has this controversy been agitated, by you, Sir, in the press, and from the pulpit ; and no ecclesiastical anathemas, that could affect your person, property, or liberty, have been launched against you.—God forbid they should, either against you who oppose the doctrine, or against any one who supports it.—I believe I can give you the right hand of fellowship on this matter, though we differ in another ; and I
 therefore

therefore own that I am under your circumstances. I do not believe the doctrine of the Trinity any more than you, Sir ; though I do not feel any desire to make any public opposition to it ; always having thought, from my earliest years, that in mere doctrinal points, where the Supreme Being and his attributes, or conduct were in question, that he, to use a vulgar phrase, was able to take his own part ; and that I ought not to be in a hurry to do more for Him, than he in his wisdom seemed to think proper to do for himself.—But surely the doctrine of the Trinity is to be elucidated or overthrown in a far different way, than any that can be pointed out, by removing all obstacles to places of profit and emolument.

“ Men,” you say, “ may live, and live
 “ comfortably, without being justices of
 “ the peace or excisemen ; but the confis-
 “ cation of goods and imprisonment for
 “ life, which would be your fate if the
 “ laws now existing were executed, every
 “ man

“man would say, would be a serious
“hardship.”

And justly would they say so. I may say so, Sir, as feelingly as you, as I am as subject to some of these obsolete penalties as you are. But as it is idle to suppose the return of any such times or principles, as those that mark the age those laws were enacted in, to indulge fears or promote them upon the subject, appears a weak way of lamenting what we ought, I own with you, earnestly to wish done away. As, Sir, I do not oppose the principles in your letter for the sake of opposition, or because of any party interests or connections, I shall as freely join you when I think you right, as declare it, when I think you in an error. I, as well as you, should rejoice to see a repeal of this statute. But was the application of the Dissenters to gain a portion of civil honour and advantage, any thing like an endeavour to clear up a doubtful point of faith or doctrine? I am, I own, surprized

E where

where you can see the analogy. I confess to me it is totally invifible.

You fay, “ It is a very unreasonable
 “ thing that the fees for marriage fhould
 “ all be given to the Minifters of the
 “ Church of England, and that thofe
 “ of the Diffenters themfelves fhould not
 “ go to their own Minifters.”

I really cannot defcend, from points of faith, and the attributes of Deity, to a paltry confideration of fees of office, without regret; and I fhall only fay on this head, that I lament feeing the pen of Dr. Priestley employed in any conteft about the loaves and fifhes; and I therefore beg thofe who apply for places of honour and emolument, to fcutinize their own hearts, and fee how far that memorable faying may or may not apply to them,

“ Verily, verily I fay unto you, ye feek
 “ me not becaufe ye faw the miracles,
 “ but becaufe ye did eat of the loaves and
 “ were filled.”

Upon

Upon the article of Subscription, you say,

“ Do all the Ministers of the Church
 “ of England, notwithstanding their sub-
 “ scription of the same Thirty-nine Ar-
 “ ticles, purposely framed in order to
 “ prevent diversity of opinion, think alike?
 “ Nay, is it not notorious that they even
 “ preach and publish as different opi-
 “ nions as the Dissenters themselves?—If
 “ then,” say you, “ that liberty was given
 “ to all by law, which some of the clergy
 “ will venture to take by connivance, the
 “ consequence of free discussion would
 “ in time produce a rational and perma-
 “ nent uniformity.”

To the first of these remarks I shall cheerfully accede, that the Ministers of the Established Church do not all think alike; nor do I see any reason in nature that can be assigned why they should be all uniform in their private opinions, on those points of the darker mysteries of christianity, about which I suspect all sides

to be equally ignorant. But I must not branch out these few remarks to a religious controversy; and therefore, as that observation of yours, Rev. Sir, has no respect to the application for the repeal of the Test Act, I have trespassed on your patience and that of the public, to introduce it, only as it lead to the following remark, that “ a free discussion would in “ time produce a rational and permanent “ uniformity”; and this, Rev. Sir, I have again quoted for the benefit of my honest fellow christians, who like the establishment, and are quiet under that, while that is easy over them; without having any restless or ambitious desires, that all mankind should think as they do, or that they should be of the same opinion as all the world; a mode of thinking of all others the most dangerous to true religion and undefiled, that which visits the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and keeps itself unspotted from the world. While this idea of general uniformity, which would change this world from what it is now to heaven by anticipation; where
nothing

nothing should be seen through a glass darkly, but all face to face, is only from the impossibility of its ever existing, calculated to light up again the fires of persecution, by the principle of infallibility which it holds out; and in which it differs from the Church of Rome only in this; that the Romish Church say they are already in the possession of it, and you, Reverend Sir, differ from them by saying, such a summit is to be gained. The consequences of these principles being so politically similar, I trust no impartial observer can mistake them, and that if in those words you have spoke your sentiments, *that such a degree of permanent uniformity is to be attained*; you have thereby bound yourself, if ever such opportunity arrive, to endeavour the establishment of such uniformity, opening a door thereby, I should fear, to all the mischiefs of religious or mistaken zeal.

You say, Reverend Sir, to the Right Hon. Chancellor of the Exchequer, "If, fir, you listen to the apprehensions of
" church-

“ churchmen, you must support every sys-
 “ tem that is once established, be it ever
 “ so absurd ; the heads of these establish-
 “ ments, and all who are supported by
 “ them, never have promoted any refor-
 “ mation, and I may therefore presume
 “ never will do it.”

And is the Right Hon. Minister blame-
 able for so doing ? certainly not ; by your
 own positive declaration, have you not
 told him, in the very opening of your let-
 ter, that “ He had nothing to do with
 “ any life beside the present ; that it was a
 “ province large enough for him, and all
 “ his colleagues in office, and that for
 “ other things, you should look to other
 “ persons.” Why then fall on the unfor-
 tunate minister, about business with which
 you yourself say he has no concern ? As
 to the perpetual lamentation about refor-
 mation in religion ; it appears very like-
 ly to lead men to be ever in search of new
 theories, without finding time to make use
 of any practice ; or, as Butler says,

“ As

“ As if Divinity had catch’d
 “ The itch, on purpose to be scratch’d ;
 “ Or that Religion were intended
 “ For nothing else but to be mended.”

“ If you (you say) must have a state re-
 “ ligion, for which I own I see no occa-
 “ sion whatever, let it be at least some-
 “ thing rational and intelligible : some-
 “ thing that mankind may see to afford a
 “ natural foundation of good conduct here,
 “ and of reasonable expectations hereaf-
 “ ter ; and such is the Unitarian doctrine,
 “ as opposed to your Trinitarian doctrine,
 “ in the Book of Common Prayer.”

I feel no repugnance to the believing in
 one God ; I know of no more that reason
 or the light of nature affords, but I love not
distinctions without *differences*. The Com-
 mon Prayer used at a certain chapel now lays
 before me : I would not venture to quote
 from a memory so defective as I fear my
 own to be ; and in the order for baptism,
 I find the following words, after dipping
 the

the child, or sprinkling it with water, put into the mouth of the minister.

I baptize thee into the name *of the Father*, and *of the Son*, and *of the Holy Spirit*; this is the *present Unitarian Form*.— I take up now the Common Prayer, as by law established, and I find the following words, for I have not trusted to memory for this, no more than the other; it being so long since I was christened, I trust I may be forgiven for having forgot the formulary; but judge what must be my astonishment, gentle reader, pause a little as I do . . . and then read from Baskerville's Common Prayer,

N. I Baptize thee, in the Name *of the Father*, and *of the Son*, and *of the Holy Ghost*.

Now, I protest, that notwithstanding the alteration, or rather lengthening of in, to into, and ghost into spirit; I judge the man who could discern the difference,

“ Could well distinguish and divide,

“ A hair 'twixt South, and Southwest side.”

The

The solemnization of matrimony, as in our form of Common Prayer, you have very pointedly attacked. I confess I cannot resist a few words on the subject. I see that in the *Unitarian*, as well as our very awkward, indelicate way, as you call it, of solemnizing it, you hold fast the same authority over those we compliment, in a very friendly manner, with the name of the Weaker Vessels, as we do ; for, I observe, there the woman promises to love, cherish *and obey*, as well as with us ; and the man only to love *and cherish*, as we do ; which convinces me that the first Unitarian marriage ceremony maker was not a lady.—Come we now to the winding up the form. Your minister says,

“ Forasmuch as N. and N. have consent-
 “ ed together in holy wedlock, and have
 “ witnessed the same before God, and this
 “ company, and thereto have engaged and
 “ pledged themselves either to other, and
 “ have declared the same, by giving and re-
 “ ceiving of a ring, and by joining of hands,

F

“ I pro-

“ I *pronounce*, that they be man and wife
 “ together. Amen.”

I was going to have wrote the same article out of the Common Prayer, as by law established, but to my great surprize found not an iota of difference. Is this then acting philosophically in the matter in debate, to talk of the Unitarian doctrine, as opposed to the worship in the Book of Common Prayer, when the differences are so trifling in all essentials; and that book, now used by the Unitarians, is four parts out of five, verbatim composed from it? and indeed I think nothing greater can be said in praise of it, as the Book of Common Prayer, only found fault with because established by law, is composed of the most sublime ideas of Deity, that the imperfection of human nature perhaps ever arrived to; the Trinity excepted, which may or may not be right, or may have a secret allegory couched under it, which in the good time and pleasure of God may be manifested. And I therefore repeat, it is an un-philosophical way of
 managing

managing the argument ; for it either admits the form right, as a set of words containing a secret influence on actions ; or necessary as an appeal to a secular and political authority, amounting to the same thing in Ecclesiastical law, as the putting a two-penny seal, with a bad impression, on a dry wafer, dangling to the end of a deed, does to the executing the same, in civil and common law.

I hope these few imperfect observations may, Reverend Sir, lead you to enquire into your principles, as well as those of the party that you join ; and, as I sincerely respect both you and them, I conjure you and them to remember, that although the Israelites resisted the Idolatry of Egypt, yet they made and bowed down to a Molten Calf in the wilderness.

You object to the circumstance of obligation to subscription to the articles of the Church, at the time of matriculation into our universities,—and to this objection the reasonable part might be

granted; namely, that students should be obliged only to subscribe to such things as are just; to such points of doctrine, and articles of faith, as are founded on the basis of right reason.—But alas! who is to be the judge of this set of articles? What would be gained by such a procedure, as the mere change of one set of articles for another, and both of them, perhaps, in some parts equally teeming with inconsistency? But should we on this account discard all articles of any kind?

The Dissenters themselves, Rev. Sir, know better—for I need not remind you of a late exclusion at a celebrated dissenting seminary near London, of a great part of the students, and those of as exemplary life and conduct as them who remained, but who were turned out because they would not, and could not they said in conscience subscribe to the religious creed of their tutor. I admire the conduct of both parties, of the men who were excluded for conscience sake, and of him who, upon rational principles, excluded

cluded them, as believing he was teaching them the best creed, because on that very principle he believed it himself; if then they did not chuse to believe the same, there was no alternative left, between the destroying all due subordination in the place, or obliging them to go and believe, and propagate their doctrines elsewhere; for as to a general agreement in the world on religious points, or even in one nation or language, I confess I never could see any the most distant reason to suppose it could take place, any more than at Court on a birth-day, every man should at once take it into his head to appear in the drawing-room in a blue coat—which I expect not; they all agree in wearing every one a coat, and surely the colour is indifferent.

We all agree there is a God, and that he is good, the author of all goodness; and that the more we can imitate his attributes, so far as we know them, the better and happier we shall be; — but
whether

whether we are to offer up our prayers bowing to the east—or no ; whether we should receive the sacrament on our knees, as the more humble posture, or sitting, because we imagine it so instituted ; whether we should call a man who officiates in that office a Presbyter or a Bishop ; whether we should pay him a stipulated sum for such ministry, or such stipend as we may think him entitled to ; these are so truly the true colour of the coat, that I feel the deepest concern in my own mind, whenever I find well-meaning men embittering the minds of the people, one against another, on such little motives, forgetting that it has been said—That in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted.

In the pursuing this argument you say
 “ — Our plans of education embrace a
 “ much greater variety of objects ; and
 “ the minds of our youth being unfettered
 “ by subscription, are certainly more open
 “ to the impression of truth.”

If

If this observation of yours be true, it militates in my mind against your plan of education in the first part of it, more than ours ; for I am very ready to own, that our own plan takes in already too many objects, and if yours takes in a still greater variety, it is then only in that case more faulty still than our own is ; for surely there is much of superfluous lore, that distracts the mind, taught in all colleges and seminaries of religious instruction ; the only apology for which mode of culture that can be made is, the active disposition of the human mind, especially in early years ; in which it is impossible to keep it always fixed entirely on those duties, which ought to be in those appointed solely for that department of life, the constant employment of every moment of their time. But as this is admitted to be unattainable, sciences are taught to fill up those hours of inattention, which might otherwise be employed in dissipation, or wasted in indolence ; for as to a remark that I have often read and heard, that by human science, ministers are better enabled

to

to illustrate divine truths, I have not been able by the tenor of the scriptures, to find it in any degree warranted, so as to impress it on my mind; having so seldom found pure and humble christianity united, with the wise, the scribe, and the disputer of this world.

The second part of the remark, Reverend Sir, you have, I humbly conceive, done away yourself;—the minds of our youth, and our aged teachers also, are by your own words allowed to be as unfettered by subscriptions as yours are; for you say a little way back, “it is notorious that many of the clergy not only think but preach contrary to those articles they have subscribed to.” What damage then does this subscription, and this establishment do to the cause of truth and free enquiry? and how does it appear, that it fetters the minds of our teachers any more than yours?

“There are (you say) also many other things relating to your Church Establishment, that ought to be attended
“to;

“ to ; such as giving some of your clergy
 “ seats in the House of Lords, by which
 “ you debase their proper character, and
 “ divert them from their proper pursuits ;
 “ the enormous disproportion in the pro-
 “ vision you make for your clergy, and that
 “ most inexpedient method of doing it
 “ by tythes.”

These are arguments so branched out,
 that not only their diffuseness, but the
 various things they embrace, prevent a
 regular answer in such a pamphlet as this.
 Suffice it to say, that if an establishment
 be not only necessary, but, as I deem it,
 highly useful, the Bishops, as a part of
 that establishment, have the highest op-
 portunities to be most eminently service-
 able in the Upper House ; where it is
 surely proper some persons connected with
 that establishment should be placed, to
 support its interests, and give every neces-
 sary information upon the various reli-
 gious questions or inquiries, that may
 of course come before that high jurif-
 diction.

G

You

You say, “ The obligation imposed on
 “ the Dissenters to contribute to the main-
 “ tenance of the Public Establishment,
 “ which you think to be essential to its
 “ support, I think to be equally tyranni-
 “ cal, unnecessary, and disgraceful to it.
 “ If it be such as really to recommend it-
 “ self to a great majority of the people,
 “ surely that great majority will support
 “ it, without the help of those who have
 “ a religion of their own to provide for.”

This argument would serve, I conceive, as a justification, for refusing payment of all taxes levied by Government, because the persons refusing should alledge that they did not like either the administration or the line of conduct, which they pursued in their official capacity.—But to view it in another light; would the people at large, if this maxim was established, contribute sufficient to maintain those who serve at the altar? Are not multitudes so careless of the interests of religion *in toto*, that if the state did not oblige

oblige them to contribute a part of their property to the maintenance of the public service of religion, they would entirely withhold such contribution, and by that means prevent the circulation of religious knowledge, which in the present day must depend upon human means for its support; for I have found few Apostles like St. Paul, either in the Church, or among the Dissenters, who have wrought with their hands, because they would not be chargeable to the brethren.

“ The aid of the Dissenters (you say)
 “ has more than once been wanted to se-
 “ cure the civil liberties of this country,
 “ and even to befriend the Ecclesiastical
 “ establishment of it, and it may be want-
 “ ed again. Our ancestors were princi-
 “ pally instrumental, both in the restora-
 “ tion of the Stuarts, and in the settlement
 “ of the crown in the present reigning fa-
 “ mily.”

God forbid, Reverend Sir, that I should deny the truth of this passage in your let-

ter; but what does it lead to? Your ancestors, the Dissenters, have assisted to befriend the establishment of this country? If then it is a dangerous and improper establishment, your ancestors acted as dangerous citizens in assisting of it; and we ought to beware of their descendants, but if it was a good establishment, they acted wisely and virtuously, in affording it such assistance; and their descendants are mistaken, to say no worse of them in their present attacks upon it. Your ancestors were principally instrumental in the restoration of the Stuarts. Admit it for a moment, but admit at the same time, that these same ancestors were the very men that brought the misguided monarch, Charles the First, to the block; and what great compliment do you then pay these poor ancestors, except loading them with the heavy charge of inconsistency?

You say, Reverend Sir, to the Chancellor, “ On no consideration, would I have
 “ any thing done by the governing powers,
 “ ers, but with the hearty concurrence,
 “ and

“ and at the requisition of the people.—
 “ All I ask of you, as one of our gover-
 “ nors, is to lay no undue bias on the
 “ minds of men. Put them into a situa-
 “ tion to judge freely, and have that con-
 “ fidence in *truth*, as to believe that it
 “ will be able to recommend and enforce
 “ itself.”

Now, sir, to what does this paragraph refer? You would not have any thing done but with the hearty concurrence, *and at the requisition* of the people. If then you think the repeal ought to have taken place, we must enquire whom you chuse to call the people; for I, who have ever understood the *majority* in all free countries, (where matters of government are at all submitted to them,) to constitute *the people*, am surprised you do not see the propriety of the Dissenters submitting to the opinion of that majority, who so far from making any requisition for such a repeal, which you, with a candour that does you honour, say would be necessary before any such alteration be made; they on the
 contrary,

contrary, when such requisition comes *not from themselves*, but from the smaller party, think it a dangerous experiment, and therefore not prudent to venture upon it ; and as to any undue bias that has been or could be laid on the House of Commons, by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I know of none in this question, nor do I think that any existed, except that which constitutes the Parliament itself, and the right of every representative who sits within its walls ; I mean freedom of speech, as well as opinion ; and if any member, or number of members, in the debate upon such bill, or any other bill, advance substantial reasons in favour of any measures, or as cogent arguments against such law passing ; and these reasons and arguments being admitted, as founded on the best constitutional principles the nature of the enquiry affords ; if then, upon such reasons fairly and honestly laid before them, they give their suffrages, I hope such bias will ever exist within that House ; as no longer than that does exist,

exist, do I expect to see the constitution continue ; and on this ground, I am very ready to put the same reliance upon truth that you do, and to believe, that the truth in which you place so proper a confidence, has been able to *recommend* and *enforce* itself, notwithstanding the late attack which has been made upon it, by so respectable a body, as I allow the petitioners to be, but whose numbers, rank or fortune, ought to weigh nothing, if they undertake the bringing about any thing that may be detrimental to the general welfare.

There is another observation of yours, which I thought to have passed over, lest the heat which is predominant in the composition of it, should have excited any warmth in reply. But I hope what I have hitherto written, has fully convinced you, Reverend Sir, and the public also, that I have no wish to make up my deficiencies in knowledge or argument, by using insolence or abuse; but that as I wish as much your advantage, and a general enlightening upon any dark parts of this subject,

for

for the sake of the Dissenters as I do for the Church, that that will always be to me, the strongest of all possible reasons for managing the controversy with moderation, not with a false and insinuating pretence to candour, but with a spirit truly influenced by its affection to both parties. Your observation is as follows,

“ It has been said, that if the Dissenters
 “ gain this point, they will aim at some-
 “ thing more. This I acknowledge. We
 “ should ask many things more, because
 “ there are many things more that we con-
 “ ceive ourselves to be entitled to, and which
 “ it will be no injury, but an advantage to
 “ our country to grant us. We are a part
 “ of the community, which in return for
 “ great merit, have received great injuries ;
 “ part of them no doubt are removed, but
 “ it does not follow, that the remainder
 “ are no burden. We feel them to be so,
 “ and shall take every fair opportunity of
 “ endeavouring to relieve ourselves. Let
 “ the Bishops be fully apprized of this,
 “ and take their measures accordingly.—
 “ We

“ We have the frankness and magnanimity, of which they are destitute, and shall not endeavour to take them by surprise.”

I hope that I shall feel much less passion in answering this paragraph, than appears to have been felt in the dictating of it. Is this religious or civil controversy? Is it designed to set the Corruptions of Christianity in their proper light, or is it intended to shew the great designs that are secretly hatching against us, from a quarter, where, in the simplicity of our hearts we apprehended no danger? But what an extent this passage may lead to, if avowed by the Dissenters, should set us about thinking, and is the strongest reason in nature for our opposing any the least alteration, as every concession that is made on the side of the establishment, will be found by this declaration to produce a new demand; and every new demand granted, must as certainly lead to the strengthening the one party, and weakening the other, till, as you intend proceeding, there

H

is

is no doubt of your going on till the establishment, or the state may want sufficient force to dare refusing the most unjustifiable demands.

This declaration surely breathes forth a spirit of attack so determined, that nothing but the allwise providence of God could have urged you to the making of it so soon, and I shall therefore not hesitate to say,—that if, after this declaration, the establishment does not watch with more circumspection over their own rights, and ours as connected with them, they will deserve whatever loss their want of circumspection may bring upon them ; and I think that the most moderate reasoners upon this subject, however before they might have been ready to have wished the petitioners success, will now see that the consequence of such success would have been new demands continually raised up, to the great injury of the internal peace and social quiet of the kingdom. And therefore after the declaration, that you should ask many things more that you
conceive

conceive yourselves to be entitled to,—it is high time for us to consider, as I before observed, whether by granting those first requested, we shall not get ourselves into such a situation, as to be obliged, however unwilling, to make every concession required, however injurious.

As to the remark, “ that you have
 “ that frankness and magnanimity of
 “ which the Bishops are destitute, and
 “ that if they have any magnanimity, they
 “ should let the motion come from them-
 “ selves ;” this must be called at any rate
 begging the question ; for while the motion, and the substance and consequences supposed to be contained in it, are a matter of dispute on both sides, it is mere declamation to talk about magnanimity in the Bishops, if they should bring forwards such a motion, when they are of opinion such a mode of conduct would be highly injurious ; and it is not you or I, Reverend Sir, that have any right to say they act merely on interested principles ;

the Searcher of hearts, he alone is master of this secret.

I shall therefore rest quiet, with the hope that these words, which on a first review appear big with some hidden danger, do only mean an application in future, for what you say would make you secure in the public profession and exercise of your religion, and not for any portion of civil power, without you are inclined to make those professions which those intrusted with that civil power think necessary ;— and if this be the meaning of this passage, I trust your candour will lead you publicly to make such a declaration, for the sake of the Dissenters at large, among whom you hold such a distinguished rank, that your avowal of any opinion of this public nature, is imagined as an avowal of the opinion of that respectable body.

But if an application should be made for the removal of idle and unjust penalties,

ties, which I allow do exist; but which the good sense and moderation of an establishment like the present will never surely put in force; yet I say should such an application be made, that will be of so different a complexion in its outset, and so different in its consequences, that I doubt not but it would meet with the hearty concurrence of those very Bishops, whom I cannot say you have kindly treated. For myself, I know I should rejoice at such a measure being adopted, because, as I conceive inward religion to be a business entirely between a man and his Maker, I know no authority a wise and good government can exert over it, but the support of professional teachers for those who chuse to come and hear them; and an uniformity of opinion among them so supported, is surely as necessary an appendage to a well-ordered state, as any court of law or equity.

I am sensible that there are many things which I have passed in your letter, which
are

are equally founded on mistaken principles, as the few I have endeavoured to answer; but as the design of these short observations, is only to convey as compendiously as possible, a few cautions to those whom the ingenuity of your letter may have made a dangerous impression upon; I shall forbear any farther observations on it,—and shall now address myself, Reverend Sir, immediately to you, as a fellow christian, concerned in the same labour of love; for though a view of your distinguished talents and erudition, your whole life spent in the prosecution of religious and philosophical enquiry, joined to the advantages of nature and education, which have been denied to me, made me very unwilling to address you on this subject; yet I found a principle within impelling me to run all risques, and encounter every obstacle, if peradventure I might in any instance stumble upon some truths, which might be overlooked by abler advocates.

Let

Let me then conjure you, Reverend Sir, to consider what are the principles of the religion of Jesus. How far distant, from the honours, profits, emoluments, and noisy contentions of the world, if you have any affection for that party which you join; if their spiritual concerns are more valuable to you than their temporal ones, which I trust they are, from their infinite and eternal consequence, let me conjure you, I repeat, not to wish the way levelled to their gaining admission to places of trust, profit, and honour; to those scenes of human business and worldly anxiety, which can never promote the cause of vital and individual piety; but do on the contrary as certainly check and impede our progress in the way of salvation. Let us not forget the young man in the gospel; all the commandments he had kept from his youth up—yet the Lord knew he lacked one thing, to sell all that he had, and give to the poor, that he might have treasure in heaven, and come and follow him—but this one thing he
could

could not do, but departed away sorrowful, because he had great possessions ;— then said Jesus, “ How hardly shall a rich “ man enter into the kingdom of heaven,” —not hardly merely because he is rich, that would be injustice in the Great Disposer of events, who causes one to come into being in a cottage, and another in a palace ; but because he set his mind on the good things of this life, and made them his idol ;—and is not the attempt to unite pure religion with worldly advantage likely to be equally dangerous to the virtue of individuals ?

I shall now take my leave of you, Reverend Sir, desiring you to believe me your sincere well-wisher, as well from the profit and pleasure I have received from your writings, as from the freedom of enquiry that has ever been an ornament to your character ; begging your pardon if in the heat of contest, I have said any thing that trespasses upon politeness, and at the same time humbly desiring the
God

God of truth to direct you, I, and all
mankind, into the way of peace, holi-
ness, and universal charity,

Wishing you virtue, health, and
happiness,

I am, Rev. Sir,

Yours in brotherly love,

A LAYMAN.

Sunday Evening,

April 29, 1787.

* * The Author of these Remarks, having been informed by a friend, since this pamphlet went to press, that two or more answers have already appeared upon the same subject,—begs leave to declare, upon his honour, that he has not seen a single line of any of them; if then he should have hit upon the same idea, or mode of reasoning, in any part of this, that more able pens have before advanced, he hopes such writers will not be offended, nor charge him with the odious crime of plagiarism, of which he takes this method to declare himself intirely innocent.



